

The Strategy of Paula

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY L.T. DRESSER

A Second Experience of Cupid and the Chaperone

LITTLE MRS. CHALLONER sighed thoughtfully. The first chapter of her career as a chaperone had closed abruptly with the high-handed high-sea marriage of her charge. That her losing struggle against Cupid should have met with applause was wholly a fortuitous accident. Cupid had laughed right in her face, as from time immemorial he has laughed at locksmiths and others of the Guild of Restraint. And now her struggle with the little pink god was to be resumed—the prize, in this case, to be Paula Folsome. Mrs. Folsome and her elder daughter still lingered in Paris. Paula had been permitted to remain with friends in Harley Street until Mrs. Challoner could pick her up on her arrival in London.

In her grey and pink suite in the Savoy, the chaperone was now savoring a few moments of freedom from responsibility. Her recent ward and the ward's newly acquired husband on the floor below were no longer vital concerns of hers; rather an amusing diversion.

The telephone sounded. Taking down the receiver she acknowledged the "Are you there?" which always made her feel intensely English.

"Lady Cuthbridge to see you, Madame."

"Oh," exclaimed Mrs. Challoner. "Ask her to come up."

An awed voice replied, after a moment, that "her ladyship would be conducted at once to the apartment."

"Vi, you dear! I'm so glad to see you!" cried Mrs. Challoner after a breathless exchange of greetings, "but who in the world told you I was here?"

Lady Cuthbridge laughed.

"Peerage Pete," of course, the modern Sam Peepsey, saw you last night—and all London knew by ten o'clock this morning. But, my dear!"—she pronounced it *de-ah*—"it's so good to see you! We'd all heard such sad gossip, we began to fear we weren't to lay eyes on you this season."

Mrs. Challoner's eyes darkened. "Vi," she said, "all the awful things you heard are perfectly true. I'm a penniless widow, chaperoning for a living;—see how white my hair has turned!—and I've got a duck of a little millionairess to seize upon tomorrow; while right in this hotel is another who eloped the moment I turned my back. Oh, I'm an unqualified success!" She laughed ruefully.

VIOLA CUTHBRIDGE'S fine eyes drew together in a quaint fussy squint. "A duck of a millionairess, you say? Tell me something about her. Is she—or—well, a probable sort of young person?"

"Ra—ther!" exclaimed Mrs. Challoner. "A beauty, and well born, too—snobette, that you are! And as for money!—I'm too stupid to think in so many figures."

Lady Vi's expression became positively conspiratorial. "Cyril," she said, and paused.

"Mrs. Folsome is ambitious," Mrs. Challoner remarked, looking anywhere but at her visitor. "In fact, she is rather counting on me to provide the entrée where—such a—"

"Exactly," nodded Lady Cuthbridge. "And I'll not conceal from you, that Cyril has got to do something—soon. The old place is shockingly run down—and fancy! he had to let the Morayshire shooting last year. Cuthbridge won't allow me to give Cyril a 'leg up'; says he's old enough to take care of himself, which he is." After which burst of confidence she paused, opened her gold bag and administered a fresh coat of powder to her aristocratic nose.

"I haven't met Cyril, you know; he was in India all the time," said Mrs. Challoner. "What's he like?"

"Oh, goodish looking chap," his sister admitted. "Well set-up, sort of general yellowish color, like all of us Middletons—upish a bit, swears that young things bore him. Oh, we shall have to share him, my dear. I say! can't you bring Miss—ah—Folsome, over to Cuthbridge House tomorrow for tea? I'll have Cyril there. I've asked Diana DeMall and Evelyn Manners. Cyril likes Diana, but poor dear, *she's* got to marry money, too. Yes," judicially,

"if this millionairess ducky of yours will do at all—" her mellow voice trailed into silence, as she arose from the settee with languid grace. "Tomorrow, then, Jeanne, my love, at five—and the golden gosling—*c'est entendu?*"

"This very afternoon," affirmed Mrs. Challoner, "the gosling shall be rounded up. Good-bye, Vi, dear."

The door closed upon Lady Cuthbridge's mauve draperies, and Mrs. Challoner executed a joyous *pas seul*.

Later that afternoon she found herself before the neat door of a neat house in Harley Street. She was ushered into a heavily Victorian sitting-room, and left to contemplate its ponderous mahogany and virtuous gloom. The tortured volutes of a marble-topped console had hypnotized her attention, when a slight sound aroused her. Standing between the dark tapestry curtains at the door was Paula Folsome. There seemed something spirit-like in the sudden appearance of the girl. She was so airy, so dainty; Rosetti might have painted her; yet his full-throated, rose-mouthed blessed damozels seemed as passion flowers beside this lily maid. Burne-Jones might have caught her elfin beauty, yet his opaque browns and blues could never have transferred to canvas her delicate radiance of color. The soft oval of her face had the golden pink of the Killarney rose. Her wide grey eyes were changeful as the sea—now green, now blue. Her hair, brown and gold and bronze all at once, rippled about her ears in virginal bandeaux.

MRS. CHALLONER gave a little gasp of admiration. "Why, Paula!" she exclaimed. "I didn't know you were there; you quite startled me!"

The girl advanced smiling. She had correctly interpreted the gasp, and was pleased.

"It's so nice of you to come," she said. "Mrs. Mortimer has been longing to meet you—and here she is."

The curtains parted once more to admit an effusively cordial little woman, who had evidently found her ideal mate in a rising young doctor and her perfect setting in Harley Street Victorianism.

"So you've come to steal Paula," she bubbled. "And I shall be quite lost without her. The little witch has Dr. Mortimer and me quite at her feet, you know."

Mrs. Challoner made just the proper response, both of regret and of tempered pleasure; and presently tea was served from a colossal silver service that taxed the strength both of the maid and the tea wagon. The wicker "enrante" groaned under its load of large, well-browned buns, toast, muffins, tea cakes and jam—a feast at once Victorian and gargantuan. Mrs. Challoner arose as soon as politeness permitted, and made her adieux.

"I shall expect you, then, Paula, tomorrow morning—or, better still, I'll come for you. I'd ask Mrs. Mortimer to tea with us, but I've made engagements,

Perhaps a little later in the week, then—charmed, I'm sure—and *au revoir*."

Once in the open air she gave a sigh of relief. The combined weight of rosewood, mahogany, silver, and the Late Lamented Queen Victoria's substantial shadow, seemed to be lifted at once from her shoulders and her spirit.

DULY the next day Paula arrived, bags, trunks, boxes and Maltese poodle. Mrs. Challoner was more and more captivated. "Probable young person," indeed! Just let Vi see for herself!

At the appointed hour the wrought iron gates of Cuthbridge House opened to admit them. Paula looked with grave delight at the formal garden that stretched between the smoke-darkened facade of the mansion, and the high gray wall that defied rabble curiosity. She seemed perfectly at ease in the pompous presence of a powdered footman, and quite at home in the great resounding drawing-room they crossed, before reaching the cosy little yellow and white salon, where Lady Cuthbridge entertained her intimates. Four or five girls were lounging in the comfortable, somewhat worn Empire chairs. A tulip-wood table that would have graced the *Musée des meubles*, bore a slim, Georgian tea service and cups of white eggshell porcelain. Without effort Paula Folsome fell into the new groove. She was simple, charming, naive, without being awkward. Lady Cuthbridge gave the chaperone a glance of meaning.

"Isn't it *too* provoking," she exclaimed, "Cyril went back on us, and Captain Maglan, too. Something's going on up the river."

"Or somebody," interjected The Honorable Evelyn Manners.

"Oh, no!" Lady Cuthbridge hurried to explain. "It's the semi-annual something or other of the Seventeenth Lancers!" She helped herself to a wafer, signing to the very large footman to place the very small cakes within reach, and retire. The Honorable Diana, a tall girl, with the physique of a guardsman, laughed mirthlessly.

"Vi, dear, what's the use! The men won't follow us—that's all. Which explains so many militant suffragettes in 'Merry' England. By the way, did you see the last Pankhurst manifesto?"

The maidless argument became heated, and it was growing late when the party separated.

"She's perfect," Lady Cuthbridge murmured to Mrs. Challoner, "and so *alive*, my dear. Now, if *only*—I'll arrange for Cyril and tea on the Terrace tomorrow."

The morrow and Lady Cuthbridge produced the promised tea, and an elderly representative from Yorkshire. Paula was enabled to gaze with admiration at both of these national exhibits, and also at the stately river and the historic Houses of Parliament from the exclusive vantage of its own Terraces



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